Amateur Radio Newsline(tm) Report 1760 - May 6 2011

Amateur Radio Newsline report number 1760 with a release date of Friday, May 6, 2011 to follow in 5-4-3-2-1.

The following is a Q-S-T. Ham radio respond as killer tornadoes rip the south-east and take a big toll in Alabama; the National Association of Broadcasters says that no broadband spectrum crisis exists, the Anchorage V-E-C suggests rules changes that could lead to a lifetime US ham license and human movement might be the thing that replaces batteries in the not to distant future. Find out the details are on Amateur Radio Newsline(tm) report number 1760 coming your way right now.

(Billboard Cart Here)

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RESCUE RADIO: HAMS BECOME FIRST RESPONDERS AS TORNADOES RAVAGE THE SOUTH AND EAST

Ham radio operators became the first responders on April 27th and 28th. This as tornadoes and other severe weather took aim at parts of the South and East. Amateur Radio Newsline's David Black, KB4KCH, is in Birmingham, Alabama, where he literally lived through the ordeal:

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Days in advance, forecasters had warned about April 27th. They said it would be a dangerous day for Alabama. What no one knew at the time was how dangerous. That afternoon would mark the largest tornado outbreak and third deadliest in U-S history. More than 300 confirmed tornadoes plow through 14 states during a three day period ending April 28th. The death toll is estimated at more than 300.

In Alabama, massive supercell storms plow through the state's warm, unstable air, spinning a series of deadly, long track tornado es. The state is hit hard--28 confirmed twisters, 250 dead statewide, with damage across the northern two thirds of the state. Thousands are left injured or homeless.

The National Weather Service says at least eleven of Alabama's tornadoes measured EF3 or greater. A single EF4 tornado--at times up to 1.5 miles wide with winds estimated to have approached 200 miles an hour--plows through Tuscaloosa and Birmingham. The massive twister stays on the ground 80 miles, tearing up homes, businesses and lives all the way.

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W4MD: "I saw people getting out from under pieces of plywood. The first person I saw was a person with blood all over their face (and) dripping of their chin. I started collecting the walking wounded and putting them into a thrift store."

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David Drummond, W4MD, is Alabama's ARRL Section Manager. He was at ground zero as the killer storm began destroying Tuscaloosa, producing horrific scenes he and many others will never forget:

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W4MD: " We were covering up the dead. The place where I stopped there was a family who lived across the street and who heard the sirens who went across from where they were living to a house with a basement and when the tornado came it picked up the house that they had left, moved it across the street; set it on the other house and killed them all. And we actually put four adults and one child in a body bag"

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Everywhere Drummond looks is destroyed. Among the victims are five students at the University of Alabama which cancels graduation. The hams trying to help Tuscaloosa's walking wounded suddenly face major communications challenges: Three repeaters being used heavily for emergency messages all go down.

Police, fire and EMA communications are also knocked out. Drummond and fellow hams have only one option: To use simplex communications.

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W4MD: "Everything was gone. At that point, that was it. It was deathly quiet and there was nobody. There was no other communications of any kind, period.

"There are still many dead and unaccounted for. We ran out of body bags.

"There's more in the morgues and a lot of them hadn't been identified. There's people in lakes and there's still a lot of(people) unaccounted for."

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For five hours after the tornado hit, Drummond says hams provided critical communications:

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W4MD: "It was slow developing for support from emergency services because it was to massive. We (ham radio operators) provided much of the communications in the beginning because there wasn't any. The Emergency Communications Center was destroyed which included the EMA which took that mechanism down. That (tornado) also destroyed the adjacent police department's communications system and part of their building which put that in disarray. It also destroyed the Red Cross building which severely interrupted their response."

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By the time the massive storm roars across I-65 just north of downtown Birmingham, it has killed at least 65 people, and injured 1,000 more, becoming the deadliest in Alabama history. Two days after the storms hit, President Obama walks through a storm-ravaged Tuscaloosa neighborhood where dusk-to-dawn curfews were in effect, and calls it beyond anything he had ever seen.

It's also beyond anything most emergency communications-minded amateur radio operators had ever imagined possible. Greg Sarratt, W4OZK, is the ARRL's Southeastern Division Director.

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W4OZK" "This scale is unprecedented and amateur radio is stepping up in a very big way. I'm proud of all the hams who are providing support"

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In north Alabama, a tornado stays on the ground 132 miles, narrowly missing downtown Huntsville and leaving at least 26 dead. Power is knocked out over so much of north Alabama, that motorists entering the state from Tennessee are warned to make sure they have gas in their cars.

Division Director Sarratt says Alabama hams have mobilized in large numbers to help a variety of agencies with communications support:

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W4OZK: "Hams have been on multiple bands from HF to 2 meters D-Star. Also a lot of 440 work providing local communications; providing regional communications; and state-wide communications for EMA, the National Weather Service. The Red Cross, the Salvation Army, Southern Baptist (Relief) and other relief type organizations."

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Scores of outlying communities are devastated, as well. In the small northwest Alabama town of Hackleburg--which lost 29 people--hardly anything remains. A tornado rated as EF-5 roars through Hackleburg, lifting a truck and dropping it back down four miles away. In the nearby town of Phil Campbell, at least 51 die.

100 miles southeast of Birmingham, a tornado slams into Dadeville at night. The storm picks up weights including a 70 pound dumbbell, throwing it about 200 yards. Volunteer firefighter Danny Lloyd, KB4MDD, walks through the debris of a devastated neighborhood to see if anyone needs help. He's not sure, but thinks he hears people calling for him in the darkness:
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KB4MDD: "I sort of ignored them in the beginning because I did not know that they were calling for me. Then they said something again and

I called out my name and it was my cousins husband and he said that `.we have someone hurt over here..'

"I went over and spent some time with an elderly lady who would ultimately expire due to her injuries. The storm made it impossible (to get more aid). She had a broken leg but it was just impossible to get her out. I mean it was not possible. All the roads were blocked.

"They were talking to me and I could see thyem but it took me five minutes or more just to climb through the (downed) trees to where they were at and her house was just gone. It was exploded."

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While trying to help the woman, Lloyd hears tornado sirens; another warning has been issued.

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KB4MDD: "I thought okay, here we go again. Of coarse we had a downpour and I found a coat laying on the ground and I was able to cover here. And she talked to me for a very long time as I stayed there with her and held her hand.

"It was a very tough ordeal as volunteer firefighter and a first responder, generally when I'm on the scene I have an ambulance crew that's coming up within seconds. They load up a patient and have them to the hospital. And this lady was within a 5-minute drive of a hospital.

"If it had been normal, you would have been at the St. Martin Hospital within 5 minutes. And the heart-breaking thing is that we could not move her without fear that of injuries and that we were going to make matters worse. And the second thing is that we had no way (to transport her). We had no back-board, no gurney to even try to load up to even try to start going somewhere in the midst of all that mess.

"Its very sad. I understand that she was 70 years old."

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BREAK 1

More with David Black, KB4KCH, in a moment. But first its time to identify. From Los Angeles, This is the Amateur Radio Newsline.

5 Sec Break

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The gruesome scenes are visible statewide. Personal items including papers and even suitcases were discovered 50 to 100 miles away from where storms hit. Trees had their bark completely removed. The ARRL ships amateur radio equipment to the state to help with emergency communications needs. Scores of relief efforts launch, with FEMA and numerous local, state and federal agencies responding.

Despite the tragically high number of fatalities, authorities believe technology kept the toll from being even worse, since so many people were able to see the storms live and the damage they were causing. Hundreds of pictures and videos are captured by residents. Tower-mounted cameras operated by government agencies and broadcasters also capture the storms.

Two men do something credited with helping save countless lives: They transmit live video of the massive tornado moments before it slams into Tuscaloosa. One of them is retired television meteorologist and storm chaser John Oldshue, KE4LMU.

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KE4LMU: "My desire has always been to get the video live so that it could be transmitted and people could get a sense of the urgency of what was approaching them."

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The video Oldshue and Ben Greer send from the field is seen live by hundreds of thousands of people watching Birmingham's ABC television affiliate. Chief Meteorologist James Spann, WO4W, warns viewers to take cover while tornadoes are on the ground in different areas at the same time:

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WO4W: "John Oldshue has a large wedge tornado that is now near Interstate 59 at the Knoxville exit and this is moving in the general direction of Tuscaloosa and Northport. So we are now calling a tornado emergency."

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Some of amateur radio's newest technology gets a trial by fire. Alabama is home to a statewide D-Star communications network. The system had never been put through such a rigorous test--until April 27th. Section Manager David Drummond :

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W4MD: "This is the first real emergency test of D-Star. So as this (weather) came through all we had to do was go back and straighten up a few antennas, reboot some equipment and we were good to go. It's a great tool. A great tool for that."

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Many Alabama hams suffered losses themselves, but Division Director Greg Sarratt says they're still helping out:

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W4OZK: "Hams that have some damage; some of them total damage and for

some not so bad. In both cases I guess they know that there is nothing that they can do to repair or fix their house at this time so they are supporting amateur radio. They are going to a Red Cross Center or a Red Cross Shelter to provide communications. Theres noything they can do at home to repair right now."

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The storms may also mean a big change about Tornado Alley...that's the corridor associated with the central plains and long thought to be where the most deadly storms strike. Alabama had been ranked 3rd in the number of tornado deaths, but that was until April 27th; the state now has a new grim honor: number one.

For now, it's the grim sights so many hams like David Drummond have to deal with:

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W4MD: "I had a woman come up to me screaming that the storm had blown her son away. I said to calm down and asked what did he look like? She told me that he had on cowboy boots, a pair of shorts and no shirt.

"I said, well you are in luck. He just came by here a few minutes ago to tell me that there was an elderly woman trapped in a basement in a church. He let a cigarette lighter so that she could see and went that way. Three minutes later I had to ask her to quit hugging me. She was so glad to know thyat her son was still alive.

"Another situation not quite as nice was shortly after this: I mean before bthe dust settled I had an unknown female come up to me and say that `.my parents were in a house right over there. The storm has blown them away.' And there was no house. There was no nothing. What do you tell somebody?

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OFF AIR AUDIO: "WC4Q from KA9Q at the Tuscaloosa EOC. Go ahead.

"This is WC4Q. Please pass to Marsha or your Red Cross rep.

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The emergency may be over, but not the need for communications help. Hams all across Alabama remain busy helping on the air, as well as with many other needs. Weather experts say the reason so many died was due to the size and path of the tornadoes. In many cases, they acknowledge, someone trying to seek shelter would not have been able to survive. Danny Lloyd:

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KB4MDD: "There was just not safe place to be. In some homes in that kind of tornado, theres just not a safe place and I think we saw that all across Alabama. There just was not a safe place to be in the path of some of these storms unless you were underground in a shelter."

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For radio amateurs active in emergency communications, the April 27th tornado outbreak hits with a shocking reality. Even though many believed they had a solid emergency preparedness plan in place, what happened that violent spring day convinces them: It's time to re-write the book.

>From the Southeast Bureau in Birmingham Alabama, I'm David Black, KB4KCH, for the Amateur Radio Newsline.

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There are some in ham radio who say that amateur operators have no place in being the first to respond to a major disaster. They question why some hams put their lives on the line for their communities. Well don't ask that to the people of Tuscaloosa, Alabama, or other South Eastern cities hit by these tornadoes and storms. They know well that the hams will be first on the scene and there to save lives, when all else fails. (KB4KCH, ARNewsline(tm))

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TORNADO DAMAGE: SEVERE WEATHER CANCELS SVHFS CONFERENCE

And the storms that hit Alabama also forced the last minute cancellation of the 2011 Southeastern VHF Society Conference that was to have been held in Huntsville, Alabama, on April 29th and 30th. According to a bulletin issued by conference planners, the mayor of Huntsville directed that all events thru the weekend be cancelled. He was also instituting a dusk to dawn curfew that was scheduled to last several days.

At the time of the press release, the Huntsville Airport was closed and the conference hotel was without power after the Tennessee Valley Authority lost towers on a 500 KV main tie line.

The conference planning committee will make a determination regarding the rescheduling of the conference to a future date. Any information regarding the rescheduling of the conference will be posted on this website at www.svhfs.org. (K4CSO)

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RADIO LAW: NAB STUDY SAYS NO SPECTRUM CRUNCH EXISTS

The National Association of Broadcasters has released a study arguing that there is no spectrum crisis. According to NAB, the research shows that insufficient analysis and reliance on faulty information in the formation of the FCC's National Broadband Plan has led to the overstated assumption of a nationwide spectrum shortage for future broadband expansion. NAB says that this is not the case,

The White House, the FCC and numerous in the wireless industry have cited a spectrum crisis as a justification for policies that would

reallocate TV airwaves for mobile broadband use. But broadcasters have said that there is no way that they will willingly relinquish even a single hertz of spectrum to broadband. .

The report authored by a former FCC aide was released the week of April 26th. It come on the heels of the NAB's recent statement reported here last week that the broadcast lobby group is in full battle mode to stop the reframing of broadcast spectrum to broadband providers. (RW)

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INTRUDER WATCH: RUSSIAN VOCODER RETURNS TO 15 METERS

The Russian vocoder system known as Yakhta has appeared again on the 15 meter band. Its been heard and logged by an IARU Region 1 monitoring station on 21 dot 001 dot 5 kHz. Its running F1B in band key-synchronized at 100 baud s and 150 Hz shift. The F1B has been active daily and at times encrypted voice transmissions have also been heard.

The German Department of Post and Telecommunications has filed another complaint about the system. The first was made back in 2010 when it was active from the same location and on the same frequency. (IARUMS - Region 1)

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BREAK 2

>From the United States of America, We are the Amateur Radio Newsline, heard on bulletin stations around the world including the W6RHC repeater serving Chico, California.

(5 sec pause here)

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RADIO LAW: ANCHORAGE VEC FILES PETITION FOR LIFETIME EXAM CREDIT

The Anchorage Volunteer Examiner Coordinator has asked the FCC to grant permanent credit to radio amateurs for examination elements they have successfully passed anytime in the past. This would, in effect, create a license exam credit that would be valid throughout an amateurs' lifetime, never expiring. Amateur Radio Newsline's Bruce Tennant, K6PZW, is here with the details:

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Currently, Amateur Radio licenses are good for 10 years. Hams may renew their license not more than 90 days before it is set to expire. If a ham fails to renew their license before it expires, but less than two years after it expires they can reapply for their license and call sign without having to retake any examination for the license. Under the current rules, hams may not apply to renew the license after the two

year grace period. Instead, they must start all over and take new examinations to receive an Amateur Radio license.

In its Petition, the Anchorage VEC asks the rhetorical question if the passage of time somehow invalidates a person's knowledge? It then states that it believes this to not be the case.

The Anchorage petition then states the groups belief that any applicants who can demonstrate that they have passed certain elements at some previous date or who have held a license grant for a particular class of license on or before various applicable dates, should not have to be re-examined on those elements before a new license can be granted. The Anchorage VEC also believes that if a person can show proof of having held a license grant for a specific class of license, they have in fact demonstrated that they have earned credit for having passed the elements required for that class of license.

According to an ARRL spokesperson, the petition filed by the Anchorage VEC does not address the cases of radio amateurs who had their licenses suspended or revoked. It says that if this Petition is looked upon favorably by the FCC, a provision should be made that no examination credit should be given if the operator license was ever suspended or revoked, or if the operator license was surrendered to avoid enforcement proceedings.

For the Amateur radio Newsline, I'm Bruce Tennant, K6PZW, in Los Angeles

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The Anchorage's plan calls for all 14 VEC's to handle these applications. At airtime no rule making number has been assigned to this rule making request. (Anchorage VEC, ARRL)

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RADIO RULES: COST OF VANITY CALL MAY RISE

The FCC wants to raise the cost of a vanity callsign by 90 cents. Currently the fee for a 10 year vanity call sits at $13.30. If the new rate is approved that will rise to $14.20 for that same 10 year period. In its press release, the FCC said it anticipates some 14,600 Amateur Radio vanity call sign or applications during the next fiscal year. That would bring in over $207,000 in fees from the vanity call program. Any new fee would start at the beginning off the FCC's next fiscal year. (FCC)

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DX

In DX, A multi-national team, all members of Mediterraneo DX Club will be active as 9N0MD from Nepal during November. Activity will be on all HF bands and modes. The team plans to give away trophies and prizes. More is on-line at www.mdxc.org/nepal.

9M6XRO is once again be active stroke V85 Brunei through May 9th. Hisa operation is mainly CW with the possibility of some RTTY or SSB. QSL via M0URX, direct, by the bureau, or via Logbook of the World.

K0YAK is now in Kathmandu and is expected to be operational as 9N7AK until early July. He is using a Kenwood TS-50 with a Cushcraft MA5V lightweight, 5-band vertical antenna. QSL via K0YAK.

Lastly, the Intrepid-DX Group will conduct a DXpedition from Afghanistan for ten days in May. Due to security concerns, the exact dates and location of the DXpedition will not be announced until the eve of their activation. For update on this operation, it is suggested to watch their Web page at www.intrepid-dx.com/t6pse

(Above from various DX news sources)

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THAT FINAL ITEM: PUBLIC THANKS WO4W AND ABC 34/40 FOR LIFE SAVING SEVERE WEATHER COVERAGE

And finally this week, yet another albeit indirect ham radio connection to the tornadoes and severe weather that hit the South-East last week. This as Alabama's ABC 33/40 television group consisting of stations WCFT, WJSU, and WBMA used a handful of web-based tools, some ham radio volunteers and a very knowledgeable forecaster to provide the local community with ongoing coverage of the devastating storm system that tore through the state on Wednesday. Amateur Radio Newsline's Michael Grebert, KJ6ZZV, has the details:

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At the point position of this outstanding storm coverage was Meteorologist James Spann, WO4W. He used Facebook and Twitter to update and interact with its audience as well as those outside the local viewing area. The station group also used Ustream to live stream the local weather radar online and the ABC 33/40 weather blog to share photos and videos, many of which were captured by viewers. Also contributing were a group of local ham radio operators, many of whom are also known ABC 33/40 Skywatchers.

Over the course of the coverage WO4W appeared regularly on the air for almost 18 straight hours giving live weather updates. When he was off camera, he was reportedly assembling the latest weather information along with photos that the station was receiving from viewers online.

As the severe weather system charged across Alabama and the death toll began to climb, ABC 33/40 s Facebook page became not only a place for the station to disseminate information. It was also a meeting ground for members of the community to interact with Spann and each other about power outages and storm damage while also taking time to honor the deceased.

What James Spann, WO4W and his crew at both the station and the volunteer hams in the field was likely best summed up by this viewers

posting on Facebook:

"I'd like to thank James Spann and all of the meteorologists and crew at ABC 33/40 for keeping not only the people of northern Alabama informed, but the whole world informed. I know dozens of people from around the country, including myself, who were watching the UStream feed faithfully all day. Your professionalism and dedication saved countless lives today."

For the Amateur Radio Newsline, I'm Michael Grebert, KJ4ZZV, in Music City, Nashville, Tennessee.

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In addition to his being the Chief Meteorologist for ABC 33/40, James Spann, is one of the founders of Weatherbrains.com. This is a weekly Internet based radio that unites weather geeks worldwide. He also owns the WO4W repeater atop Shades Mountain that serves the greater Birmingham area.

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NEWSCAST CLOSE

With thanks to Alan Labs, AMSAT, the ARRL, the CGC Communicator, CQ Magazine, the FCC, the Ohio Penn DX Bulletin, Radio Netherlands, Rain, the RSGB, the Southgate News and Australia's WIA News, that's all from the Amateur Radio Newsline(tm). Our e-mail address is Newsline (at) arnewsline (dot) org. More information is available at Amateur Radio Newsline's(tm) only official website located at www.arnewsline.org. You can also write to us or support us at Amateur Radio Newsline(tm), 28197 Robin Avenue, Santa Clarita California, 91350

And a reminder that the nominating period for the year 2011 Amateur Radio Newsline Young Ham of the Year Award is now open. Created by Newsline back in 1986, this award is offered to recognize one young United States or Canadian radio amateur age 18 or younger for his or her contributions to society through Amateur Radio.

As in years past, the 2011 recipient will receive an expense paid trip to the Huntsville Hamfest in Huntsville Alabama courtesy of Vertex-Standard Corporation which produces Yaesu brand amateur radio gear. Vertex-Standard will also present this years winner with a special ham radio related gift. CQ Magazine will again treat the recipient to a week at Spacecamp-Huntsville. We at Amateur Radio Newsline will present the winner with a plaque honoring his or her achievements.

All nominations and materials required by the official rules must be received by ARNewsline before June 30, 2011. A downloadable nominating form is at our website at www.arnewsline.org. A nominating form can also be obtained by sending a request along with a self addressed stamped envelope to the Young Ham of the Year Award in care of Amateur Radio Newsline, Inc. 28197 Robin Avenue, Santa Clarita California 91350.

Again, the cutoff date for this year's Young Ham of the Year Award nominations is June 30th. We ask you to do your part by nominating a young ham who has done something special related to ham radio. The nomination form is at www.arnewsline.org

For now, Im Bill Pasternak, WA6ITF, at the editors desk saying 73 and we thank you for listening.

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